# Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



**Francis CLEYN (Rostock 1582 - London 1658)**

**Design for a Tapestry: Putti Bringing in a Boat Bearing Bacchus(?) to Land**

Pen and black ink and grey wash.

Laid down.

Inscribed HONI SOIT QUI MAL PENSE in black ink surrounding the 17th century Royal Coat of Arms at the top, and with a monogram (DLMA?) in a cartouche at the bottom.

354 x 496 mm. (13 7/8 x 19 1/2 in.)

ACQUIRED BY THE FINE ARTS MUSEUMS OF SAN FRANCISCO.

This large sheet represents the design for a lavish Baroque tapestry. The right-hand side of the panel shows a magnificent galleon, splendidly carved with a merman figurehead and manned by putti who are shown retrieving the sail and deploying oars in preparation of landing ashore. Seated on the throne-like raised stern, with one foot resting on a globe and shaded by a parasol, is a regally dressed putto, crowned with a laurel wreath, who may represent Bacchus. Standing ashore in the left foreground are further putti hauling in a fishing net and handling their catch, while in the right foreground appears the bow of a second ship, also manned by putti. The scene is framed by elaborate borders, centered to the top with the English Royal coat of arms, which provides a terminus ante quem for the drawing of before 1689. (The Royal Coat of Arms depicted in this drawing is the one that was in use between 1603, when James VI of Scotland assumed the throne of England as James I, and 1688.) The coat of arms, crowned and encircled by the Order of the Garter, is flanked by anchors wrapped with foliate garlands, while the lower border is centered by a cartouche with Roman letters. The corners are set with further cartouches, while the reserves show scenes of putti busying themselves with floral garlands, trumpets as well as hunting and fishing gear and trying to restrain a swan and a goat.

Parallels to documented designs for tapestries and tapestry borders, as well as to a set of large-scale paintings, created between 1637 and 1640 for the Green Closet at Ham House in Richmond, allow for an attribution of this impressive drawing to Francis Cleyn the Elder. Painted for the 1st Earl of Dysart, a close confidant of King Charles I, the four almost tapestry-sized panels at Ham House - measuring up to three and a half metres in width - were inspired by a series of six narrow panel paintings of friezes in an all'antica style, depicting putti at play, by the 16th century Italian painter Polidoro da Caravaggio,

which had been acquired by Charles I in 1637 for the Palace of Whitehall and remain in the Royal Collection today. Cleyn's panels for the Green Closet at Ham House similarly depict naked putti playing games and in various country pursuits. One of these paintings - a scene of a group of putti lined up at a shore, hauling on a rope to pull in their catch - can be linked with one of the Polidoro frieze paintings, which are now at Hampton Court, as well as with the present sheet. In this drawing Cleyn closely followed the painting by Polidoro in the Royal Collection, showing the putti hauling in a fishing net, heavy with its catch and with its cork floaters attached, while he slightly adapted the scene for Ham House, showing the putti pull in a fellow putto on a shell instead.

Close parallels can also be drawn between the tapestry borders in this drawing and those designed by Cleyn for the celebrated Acts of the Apostles tapestries of Raphael. As has been noted, 'The finest of all examples of Mortlake tapestry are the Acts of the Apostles, woven for Charles I perhaps by late March 1629. Acquired by Cardinal Mazarin at the dispersal of the royal collection, they thereafter became the property of Louis XIV…A joyous feature of these, as indeed of so many Mortlake tapestries, are the inventive borders – expressions of Cleyn's exuberant creativity.' Certainly, Cleyn's borders for the Acts of the Apostles tapestries contain much of the artist's finest and most inventive work. Given the sea-based theme of the present sheet, comaprisons may in particular be made with Cleyn's border designs for The Miraculous Draught of Fishes tapestry from the Acts of the Apostles, today in the Mobilier National in Paris. The putti show the same movements and energy in their various actions, be it handling long floral garlands or large fish, or struggling with goats or swans. Similarly, the vase-shaped fisherman's basket, spilling out its catch at the lower left-hand margin of the present sheet, also appears in the lower border of the Miraculous Draught of Fishes tapestry.

Cleyn is thought to have made designs for a set of tapestries known as depicting 'Playing Boys', which were likely inspired by Polidoro's frieze paintings, but no finished tapestries survive or are recorded, and may never have been executed in his lifetime. (Nevertheless, tapestries known as 'Polidoro' types, derived from the paintings by Polidoro da Caravaggio now at Hampton Court and possibly based on designs by Cleyn, became popular again and were rewoven in the years after Cleyn's death and following the restoration of the monarchy in 1660.) The discovery of the present sheet, which represents the only known surviving design for such a series complete with borders, indicates that Cleyn might have intended the set to be much more lavish than the later versions woven in the 1660s would suggest. (King Charles II acquired such a set in 1667-1668 from Francis Poyntz, then the director of the Mortlake tapestry factory, while a further set survives at Hardwick Hall.)

The Royal arms in the upper border of this drawing certainly signify that it must have been a royal commission, while the Latin lettering or numbering in the central cartouche of the lower border suggest it was conceived as part of a larger set. Intriguingly the cartouches in the four corners of the drawing all differ from one another. The top left cartouche appears framed with wheat or reeds and the bottom right with a floral garland, while that at the top right is modelled with stylized dolphins and the bottom left with small fish spilling from a fisherman's basket or trap. While this might be a reference to a Royal patron, representing glory at sea and on land, it is also possible that, as with contemporary architectural drawings, the cartouche designs differ deliberately, allowing Cleyn to present his client with a choice of four different options. This would support the idea that this large and impressive sheet was intended as a first design or proposal for a tapestry, which might have never been realized.

The present sheet once belonged to the curator and scholar Edward ('Teddy') Croft-Murray (1907-1980), who served as Assistant Keeper and later Keeper of Prints and Drawings at the British Museum. An expert on early English drawings, he joined the museum in 1933, and produced two catalogues of the drawings of the British School (one of which has remained unpublished) at the British Museum, as well as the seminal book Decorative Painting in England 1537-1837, before his retirement in 1972.

**Literature:**

James Byam-Shaw, 'Obituary. Edward Croft-Murray (1907-80)', The Burlington Magazine, February 1981, p.100 (as Sir James Thornhill).

**Artist description:**

The son of a goldsmith, the artist Francis Cleyn (sometimes Clein or Klein) was born in the North German city of Rostock, on the Baltic Sea, and seems to have entered the service of King Christian IV of Denmark around 1611. After a study trip of four years to Italy, where he spent time in Venice (meeting the English ambassador there) and probably also in Rome, he was back in Denmark by 1617. Cleyn's Italian sojourn was to prove highly influential on his mature style and is readily evident in the painted ornamental decorations he produced for Christian IV at Rosenborg Castle in Copenhagen between 1618 and 1623, which depicted pastoral landscapes, genre scenes and Italianate grotesques. (He also worked in the Danish royal castles of Frederiksborg, Christiansborg and Kronborg.) Cleyn is thought to have first visited England in 1623, on the recommendation of the English ambassador in Copenhagen, and had settled permanently in London by 1625. He worked extensively as a decorator and designer for Charles I, including designing the King's Great Seal, and was awarded a yearly pension of £100.

Cleyn's first major public commission in England was for the now-lost ceiling decoration of the cabinet of Queen Henrietta Maria at Old Somerset House in London, which he decorated with allegorical figures of the arts above a frieze of putti, flowers, emblems and grotesques. (He also painted an altarpiece of The Crucifixion, since destroyed, for the Queen at St. James's Palace.) Cleyn was highly regarded as a decorative mural painter, although almost all of his work in this field, including wall paintings at Holland House in London, Carew House in Parson's Green and Stoke Bruerne in Northamptonshire, has been lost. The artist's only surviving paintings are a series of interiors in several rooms at Ham House in Richmond, painted for William Murray, 1st Earl of Dysart. As one scholar has written of the artist, 'In terms of technical ability, Cleyn the Elder was certainly inferior to Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641) or Orazio Gentileschi (1563-1639), his more talented contemporaries in London. But he far surpassed either as a composer of narratives; indeed, he was the greatest storyteller in English art until Antonio Verrio (c.1639-1707) undertook the decoration of the State Rooms at Windsor Castle around 1675.'

Cleyn is best known today for his work at the tapestry manufactory at Mortlake in Surrey, established by the Crown in 1619. Appointed chief designer at Mortlake soon after his arrival in England, with an annual salary of £250, Cleyn drew the original designs for the Hero and Leander series of tapestries, completed in 1636, as well as the series of Horses, The Five Senses and the borders for Raphael's Acts of the Apostles tapestries. (As Edward Croft-Murray has noted, Cleyn was in particular 'much appreciated for his grotesque[s]…the borders of his tapestries display several varieties of it, both Italian and Flemish.') Mortlake produced exceptionally fine tapestries of Raphael's seven cartoons, to which Cleyn added decorative borders as well as an eighth scene of his own invention; The Death of Sapphira, which measured some four by six and half metres and contained over twenty figures. The artist continued to work at Mortlake throughout the Civil War and during the period of the Commonwealth. Cleyn also produced a number of prints of decorative and grotesque motifs, together with designs for book illustrations, seals, title pages and ephemeral architecture.

Drawings by Francis Cleyn are today in the British Museum in London, the Louvre in Paris and the Statens Museum for Kunst in Copenhagen, while a 17th century album containing several dozen drawings by the artist - mainly figure, drapery and portrait studies, as well as several designs for tapestries - has recently been discovered in the collection of Southampton University. Two watercolour designs by Cleyn for the side borders of one of the Acts of the Apostles tapestries have recently been acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.